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ABSTRACT

Statewide information concerning the Connecticut eight-grade public school students who particpated in the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) in the spring of 1988 is presented. Over 900 students in 46 schools in 35 school districts, almost evenly divided between males and females, completed cognitive tests and student surveys about demographics and a range of additional topics. The same students are being tested in 1990 and will be followed biennially through 1994. About one-third (36.3%) of the students were considered educationally at risk, with Black students and Hispanic students more likely to have one or more identified risk factors. Seventeen percent of the students had repeated at least one grade. A large majority (86.5%) planned to attend public high school; 1 in 10 planned to attend a private high school. One-third (32.2%) planned to enter a college preparatory program, while 73.4% planned to attend college. Outside of school, students spent more time watching television than doing homework, and stated that music and sports were their most popular extracurricular activities. Suburban students were more likely to consider drugs a serious problem in their schools than were non-suburban students. About 81% felt that the quality of teaching at their schools was good. Black and Hispanic students were more likely to feel good about themselves than were White students. Eight data tables and 11 graphs summarize the NELS data. (SLD)

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CONNECTICUT PARTICIPATION IN THE NATIONAL EDUCATION LONGITUDINAL STUDY (NELS).

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Connecticut State Department of Education
Division of Research, Evaluation and Assessment

School Year 1989-90
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RESEARCH BULLETIN

Bureau of Research and Teacher Assessment

CONNECTICUT PARTICIPATION IN THE NATIONAL EDUCATION LONGITUDINAL STUDY (NELS)

The data in this bulletin are the first presentation of statewide information obtained from the Connecticut eighth grade public school students who took part in the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) in the spring of 1988.

Forty-six Connecticut public schools in 35 school districts participated. Over 900 students, or about three percent of the state's public school eighth grade population, completed cognitive tests and student surveys. The student survey requested information about basic demographic background variables and a range of additional topics including schoolwork, aspirations and social relations. Data on test results will be presented in future bulletins as they become available.

During 1990, the same students are again being surveyed and tested as tenth graders. These students will be followed biennially through 1994, as they graduate or leave high school and enter postsecondary education or careers.

ONE-THIRD OF CONNECTICUT EIGHTH GRADERS EDUCATIONALLY AT RISK

About one-third (36.3%) of the students were considered educationally at risk, as defined by one or more of the following: (a) from a single-parent family, (b) with parent(s) having no high school diploma, (c) of limited English proficiency, or (d) being a latchkey child left alone for more than three hours per weekday. The proportion of at-risk students (using the above definition) varies considerably by race. As Table 1 indicates, black and Hispanic students are more likely to have one or more of the identified risk factors.

Racial/Ethnic Group	No Risk Factors	At Least One Risk Factor	Two or More Risk Factors
Black	32.8%	67.2%	27.9%
Hispanic	37.3%	62.7%	25.3%
White	76.2%	23.8%	3.7%
Total	63.7%	36.3%	10.1%

Table 1. Connecticut Eighth Graders Educationally At Risk By Race

The most commonly occurring risk factor is being part of a single-parent family. Almost one in four of the Connecticut students (23.9%) was from a single-parent family; this is slightly higher than the percentage of students nationwide from single-parent families (22.3%). In Connecticut more than one-half (51.9%) of the black students and 40.9 percent of the Hispanic students were from single-parent families. Additionally, students from single-parent families were more apt to be in families in the lowest socioeconomic quartile (48%), have NELS test scores in the lowest quartile(43.2%) and have school grades in the lowest quartile (38.9%). About one in seven of Connecticut students (15.0%) reported being alone more than three hours per day; 8.5 percent had parents with no high school diploma; and less than one percent were of limited English proficiency.

SEVENTEEN PERCENT OF EIGHTH GRADERS HAVE REPEATED A GRADE

Seventeen percent of the Connecticut eighth graders reported repeating at least one grade. Nationally, about the same percentage of eighth graders (17.7%) have repeated at least one grade. Connecticut males were more likely to have repeated a grade (21.6%) than females (13.0%).

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Minorities and students from families with low socioeconomic status were more likely to repeat grades. There was no significant difference in

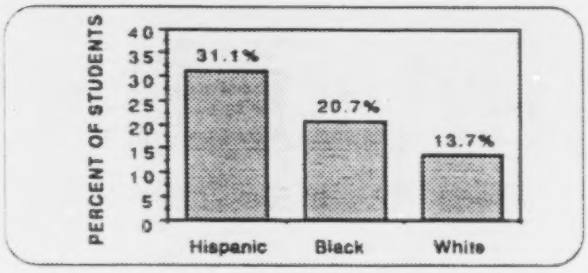

Figure 1. Students Reporting Repeating at Least One Grade by Race

repeating grades among urban, suburban and rural students. Generally, the most frequently repeated grades, both in Connecticut and the nation, were kindergarten, first and second grade.

STUDENT PLANS AND ASPIRATIONS

Eighth-grade students were asked about their plans for high school as well as plans for continuing their education or entering careers after high school completion. A large majority (86.5%) of the students indicated they planned to attend public high school following completion of eighth grade. The survey data were accurate, since actual data showed 86.7 percent entered public high school in the fall of 1988. One in 10 students planned to attend private school (7.8% private-religious, and 2.2% private-nonreligious schools) and 3.5 percent didn't know their plans. This is roughly equivalent to students' plans nationwide: 88.1 percent of all eighth graders reported plans to attend public high school; 9.3 percent private (7.5% religious, 1.8% nonreligious); and 2.5 percent indicated they did not know. In Connecticut, Hispanic and black students were slightly more likely to plan to attend public schools (92.4% and 88.4%, respectively) than white students (85.1%). Students from families with higher socioeconomic status and students whose parents attended college were more likely to plan to attend private high schools than other students.

ONE-THIRD OF EIGHTH GRADERS PLAN TO ENROLL IN A COLLEGE PREPARATORY PROGRAM

One-third (32.2%) of the Connecticut eighth graders indicated they planned to enroll in a college preparatory program, while 23.2 percent planned to enter a vocational program and 18.9 percent planned a general high school program.

The remaining students either did not know (16.2%) or identified another program such as fine arts (9.5%). Students from rural and suburban districts were more likely to indicate plans to enter a college preparatory program, while urban students were more likely not to know what program they planned to enter (see Table 2).

Type of District	College Prep	Vocational Program	Gen'l Prog.	Other Prog.	Don't Know
Urban	19.4%	31.7%	12.1%	17.2%	19.6%
Suburban	37.7%	16.7%	23.9%	5.7%	16.0%
Rural	42.8%	25.0%	18.0%	4.3%	9.9%
Total	32.2%	23.2%	18.9%	9.5%	16.2%

Table 2. High School Program Connecticut Eighth Graders Expect to Enter

Nationally, relatively fewer students planned to enter college preparatory programs (29.2%), and more students (25.1%) didn't know which program they would enter (see Figure 2).

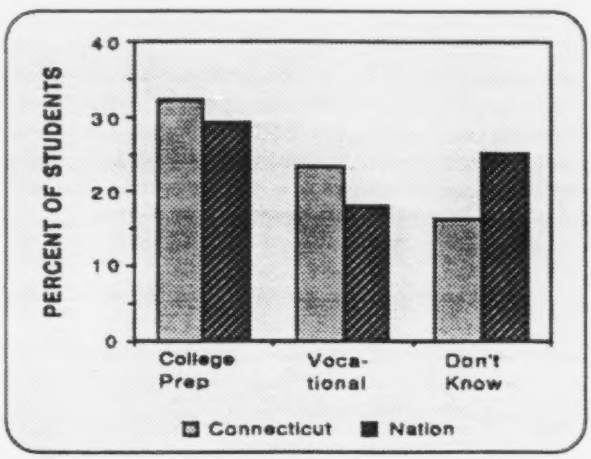

Figure 2. High School Program Students Expect to Enter – Connecticut and the Nation

Connecticut students from families in the lowest socioeconomic quartile, with low grades and low NELS test scores were generally less likely to plan college preparatory programs, and more likely not to know which program they planned to enter. Overall, over one-third (34.4%) of the Connecticut eighth graders and 64.1 percent of the eighth graders nationally had not discussed high school plans with a guidance counselor by the spring before beginning high school. Over half (50.7%) of the Connecticut eighth graders who were not sure which program they would enroll in had not discussed plans with a counselor.

THREE-QUARTERS OF EIGHTH GRADERS PLAN TO ATTEND COLLEGE

Although only one-third of the students indicated they planned to enroll in a college preparatory program in high school, almost three-quarters of the Connecticut students (73.4%) and 78.6 percent of the nation's students indicated they plan to complete at least some college. For comparison, 67.1 percent of the 1989 public high school graduates from Connecticut entered either a two- or four-year college upon high school completion vs. 56.8 percent of the nation's students in 1987 (latest available data). Only 1.2 percent of the eighth graders in Connecticut indicated that they did not plan to finish high school, while currently about 20 percent don't graduate with their class.

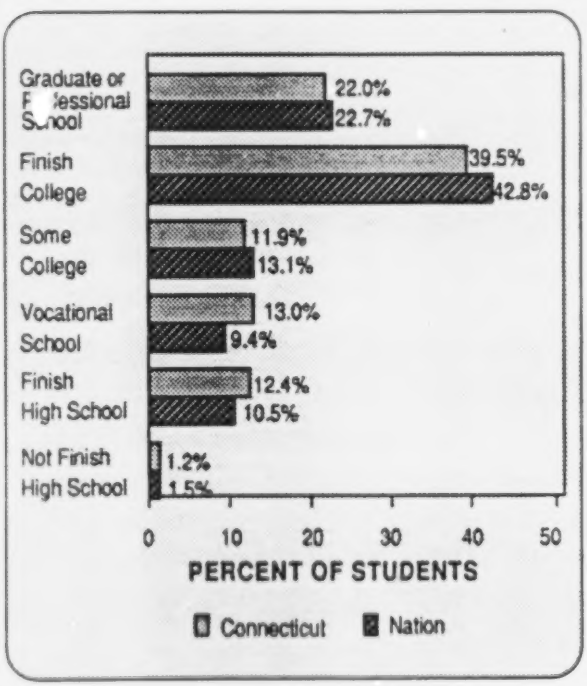

Figure 3. Expected Highest Educational Attainment of Students, Connecticut and the Nation

Overall, 84.7 percent of the Connecticut eighth graders felt "very sure" they would graduate from high school. This is slightly more than the 82.5 percent of the students nationally who felt "very sure" they would graduate from high school.

In Connecticut, more than one of every four Hispanics (28.9%) indicated they would not continue their education after high school. In addition, 11.5 percent of whites and only 6.5 percent of blacks also indicated they would not be continuing their education after high school.

Only 17.9 percent of the Connecticut students from single-parent families planned to graduate from college, while 72.4 percent of the students living with both parents planned to do so.

ONE IN TEN STUDENTS UNSURE OF FUTURE JOB

While it is likely that eighth graders would not have been exposed to enough career counseling information to feel confident about their plans for future jobs, students were asked to indicate what type of job they expected to be in when they were 30 years old. Some interesting patterns emerged.

Students in the nation were somewhat more likely to anticipate being in a professional or managerial job at age 30 than Connecticut students.

Anticipated Job at Age 30	Percent of Eighth Graders Connecticut	Nation
Professional/Mgmt.	30.9%	34.5%
Sales/Clerical/Service	8.5%	7.7%
Own Business	8.3%	6.2%
Military/Police	7.7%	9.6%
Technical	7.5%	6.2%
Craftsworker	5.7%	4.2%
Other	20.8%	21.1%
Don't Know	10.6%	10.5%

Table 3. Anticipated Job at Age 30

While overall 10.6 percent of the Connecticut students didn't know what job they would have at age 30, blacks and Hispanics were more likely not to know (24.4% and 10.5%, respectively) than whites (7.8%). Females were more likely to anticipate being in professional or management jobs (36.9%) than males (24.3%). Students from families with low socioeconomic status, low grades and low NELS test scores were more likely not to know, and less likely to identify a professional or managerial job.

TELEVISION DOMINATES HOMEWORK AS OUTSIDE ACTIVITY

Students were asked a series of questions on time spent outside of school, particularly time spent completing homework, watching television, reading unrelated to school, and participating in organized activities such as scouting or church-related functions. Over half (57.6%) of Connecticut students reported spending a total of two to five hours per week on all their homework, or about one-half to one hour per school night. An additional 20.9 percent spent one to two hours per school night. Students in Connecticut reported spending roughly the same amount of time per school night on homework as their peers nationally.

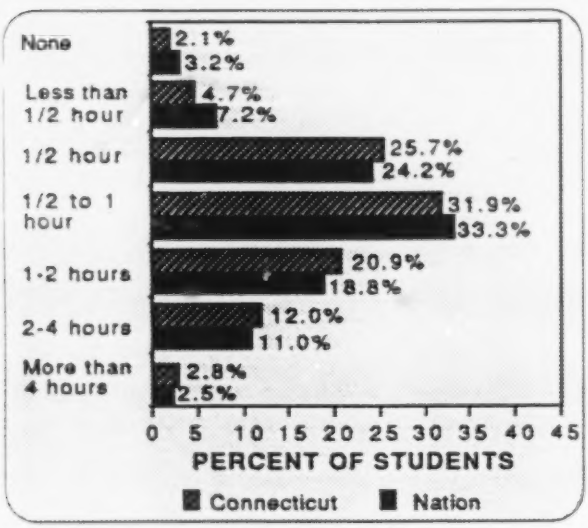

Figure 4. Time Spent on Homework Per School Day

In Connecticut, over half of all students spent less than one hour per week per subject area on English, science and mathematics homework. This translates into spending about one-half hour per school night on all homework for science, math and English classes.

Hours Per Week	English	Science	Math
None	6.5%	13.1%	6.1%
Less than One	50.3%	51.2%	46.0%
One to Two	22.7%	20.1%	20.5%
Two to Three	11.0%	7.7%	12.0%
Three to Four	5.6%	4.6%	8.4%
Four to Six	3.9%	3.3%	7.0%

Table 4. Hours Spent on Homework Per Week by Connecticut Eighth Graders

Students in Connecticut were more likely to spend time doing homework in English, science and mathematics than their peers nationwide. In the nation, 11.5 percent of the students reported doing no English homework (vs. 6.5% of Connecticut students), 17.6 percent reported doing no science homework (vs. 13.1% of Connecticut students) and 9.0 percent reported doing no mathematics homework (vs. 6.1% of Connecticut students).

Students who spent a relatively small amount of time on homework generally spent a considerable amount of time watching television: 43.3 percent of those spending one-half to one and one-half hours on all homework per week (or less than 20 minutes per school day) reported spending over five hours each school day watching television.

Almost half of the Connecticut eighth graders (46.9%) reported watching one to three hours of television per day during the weekdays; one-quarter (25.1%) watched three to five hours per day; and 18.2 percent reported watching over five hours of television per day Monday through Friday. Nationally, relatively more students reported watching television for less than one hour per day (11.2% vs. 9.8% in Connecticut) and fewer students reported watching television for more than five hours per day (13.5% vs. 18.2% in Connecticut).

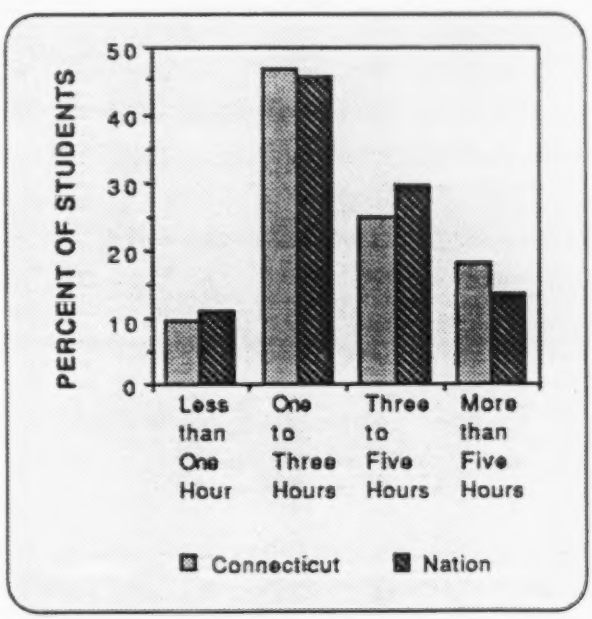

Figure 5. Hours Spent Watching Television Per School Day

Hispanic and black students in Connecticut reported watching more television than their white classmates.

Racial/ Ethnic Group	Less Than 1 Hour	1-3 Hours	3-5 Hours	More Than 5 Hours
Black	3.3%	38.8%	13.9%	44.0%
Hispanic	14.9%	23.5%	27.4%	34.2%
White	10.5%	52.0%	27.6%	9.9%
Total	9.8%	46.9%	25.1%	18.2%

Table 5. Hours Spent Watching Television Per Weekday Reported by Connecticut Students by Racial/Ethnic Group

Of Connecticut students reporting watching over five hours of television per day, about one-third (35.9%) were from the lowest socioeconomic quartile and one-third (33.3%) were from the lowest NELS test score quartile.

About one of every five eighth graders in Connecticut (19.4%) and in the nation (20.8%) did no reading which was not part of their schoolwork. In Connecticut, of those who did no outside reading, over half (51.8%) spent more than three hours per weekday watching television.

Overall, about three-quarters of the Connecticut students (72.2%) reported participating in organized activities outside of school, the most common being nonschool team sports, religious youth groups and summer programs. Participation increased with increasing socioeconomic status and NELS test scores.

Urban students were less likely (61.0%) to participate in organized activities outside of school than suburban (78.2%) or rural (78.1%) students. Also, white students (77.9%) were more likely to be involved in outside activities than black (58.1%) or Hispanic (56.0%) eighth graders.

MUSIC AND SPORTS MOST POPULAR SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Connecticut eighth graders were asked whether they participated in any of a group of school activities during the current school year. Over 40 percent (42.0%) reported participating in band, orchestra or chorus. Intramural and varsity sports were also popular, with 38.0 percent and 38.9 percent of the students participating, respectively.

With the exception of sports and science fair participation, Connecticut students reported roughly the same participation rates as students nationwide. About one of every eight Connecticut students (13.5%) participated in science fairs; this was less than half the percentage of students nationally (28.3%). Students nationally reported greater participation in sports than Connecticut students (varsity 47.8% vs. 38.9% in Connecticut; intramural 42.5% vs. 38.0% in Connecticut).

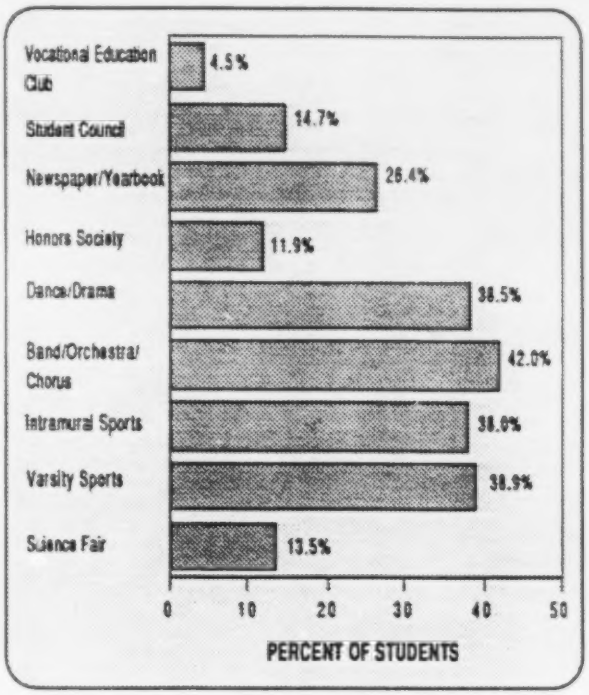

Figure 6. School Activities of Connecticut Eighth Graders

SALE AND USE OF DRUGS CONSIDERED A GREATER PROBLEM BY SUBURBAN STUDENTS

Students were asked if illegal drug use was a serious, moderate or minor problem or not a problem at their schools. About one of every eight students in the eighth grade in Connecticut (12.9%) reported that student use of illegal drugs was a serious problem in their schools, and 13.4 percent reported student use of alcohol was a serious problem. Somewhat more suburban students in Connecticut reported drugs or alcohol as a serious problem than urban or rural students. Drugs were reported to be offered for sale on school property to 7.4 percent of all students, with the percentage higher for suburban students (9.2%) than urban students (5.5%) or rural students (5.9%).

Nationally, 10 percent of eighth grade students reported illegal drugs had been offered to them for sale on school property; 14.2 percent reported student use of illegal drugs was a serious problem in their schools; and 15.3 percent reported use of alcohol was a serious problem.

Students were also asked to identify any behavior-related problems they had during the first semester of their eighth grade. In Connecticut almost one-third (30.5%) of the students indicated they had been sent to the office for misbehavior and 21.5 percent reported having a physical fight with another student (see Figure 7).

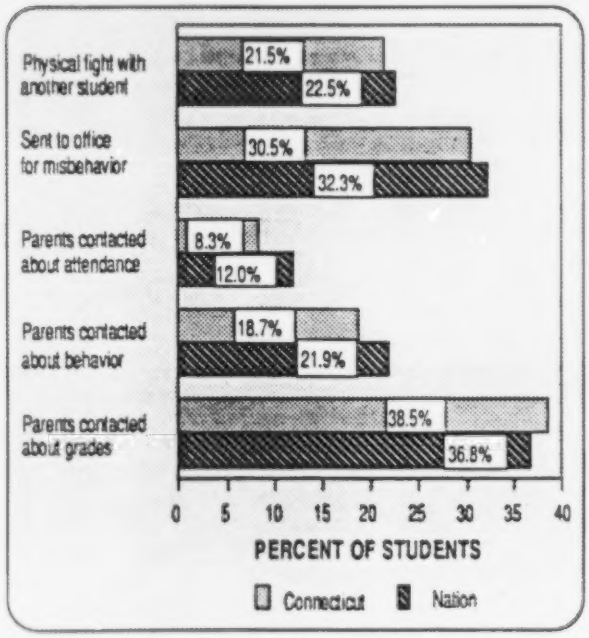

Figure 7. Reported Behavior-Related Problems

Nationally, roughly the same percentages of students reported the above behavior-related problems, except more students indicated parents had been contacted about attendance (12% nationally vs. 8.3% of Connecticut students) and student behavior problems (21.9% nationwide vs. 18.7% in Connecticut).

Different behavior-related problems were considered serious by students depending on the type of district they were from. Students from urban districts were more likely to identify tardiness, absenteeism, class cutting, physical conflict, robbery and verbal abuse of teachers as serious problems at their school. Students from suburban districts, however, were more likely to consider student use of alcohol and illegal drugs and vandalism serious problems.

Students were asked to indicate how many days they either missed school or were late in the previous four weeks. One in five students (19.7% of Connecticut students and 21.0% of the nation's students) reported they missed three or more days over the previous month, or at least 15 percent of the school time (see Table 6).

Number of Days	Missed School CT	Missed School U.S.	Late for School CT	Late for School U.S.
None	43.8%	45.3%	62.8%	63.2%
1-2	36.5%	33.7%	27.0%	25.2%
3-4	13.4%	13.3%	5.9%	7.5%
5-10	5.2%	5.4%	3.0%	2.5%
More than 10	1.1%	2.3%	1.3%	1.6%

Table 6. Students Reporting Missing School or Being Late in Last Four Weeks, by Number of Days

OVER 80 PERCENT OF STUDENTS FEEL TEACHING IS GOOD AT THEIR SCHOOL

Students were asked to agree or disagree (or strongly agree or strongly disagree) with a series of statements about their school atmosphere and safety-related issues. Figure 8 shows the percentages of students either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements.

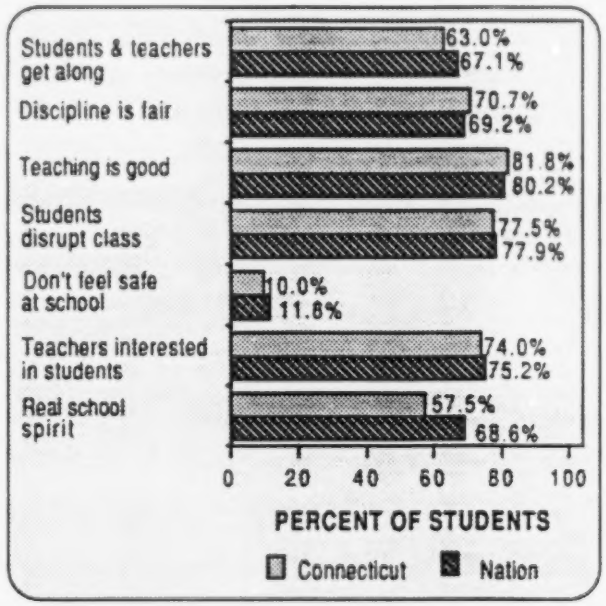

Figure 8. Students Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing with Statements About School

In Connecticut, over 80 percent (81.8%) felt the teaching was good at their schools, but 77.5 percent indicated they felt students disrupted classes; and 10.0 percent reported they did not feel safe at school.

Nationally, students reported the same perceptions of their schools and teachers with regard to teaching quality, teacher interest in students, the ability of teachers and students to get along, discipline fairness and student disruption of classes. Relatively more students nationwide (11.8%) reported not feeling safe at school than Connecticut students (10.0%); but more students nationwide agreed there was real school spirit at their schools (68.6%) than Connecticut students (57.5%).

STUDENT SELF-CONCEPT AND SENSE OF CONTROL: BLACKS AND HISPANICS HAVE HIGHER SELF-CONCEPT

Students were asked a series of questions related to how they felt about themselves and the level of control they felt they had over their lives. When responses were aggregated, more students fell into a low self-concept category (38%) than either medium (27%) or high (35%). More males were considered to have a high self-concept (39%) than females (31%). By race, blacks and Hispanics generally felt better about themselves than their white classmates.

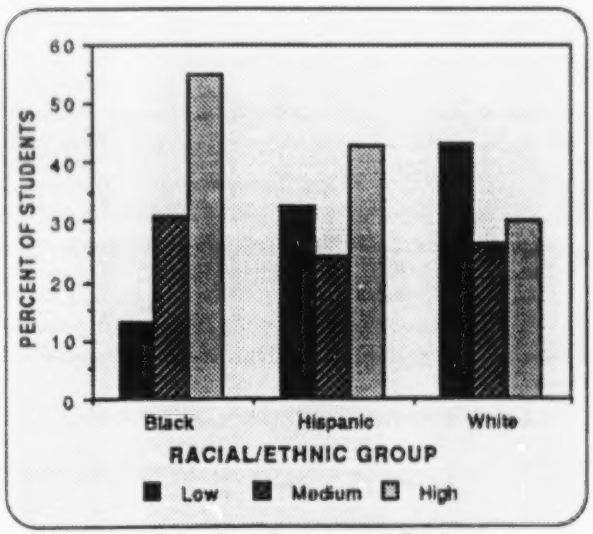

Table 7. Self-Concept of Students by Racial/Ethnic Group

Students were asked whether they agreed or disagreed (or strongly agreed or disagreed) with a series of statements about teacher response to their efforts. Black and Hispanic students were more likely than white students to report positive response by teachers (see Figure 9).

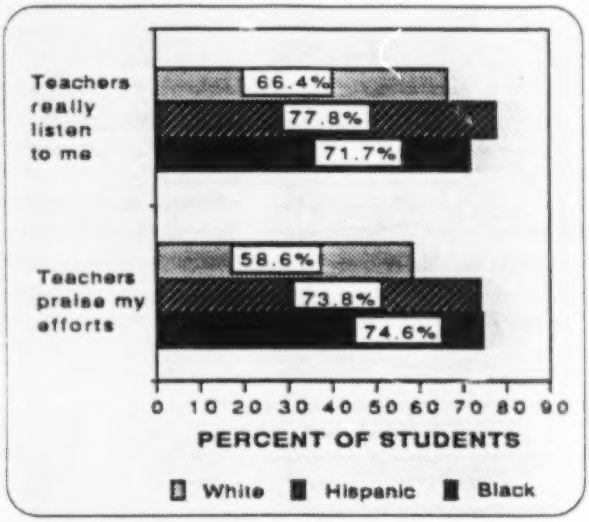

Figure 9. Percent of Students Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing with Statements on Teacher Response

Interestingly, students from families in the lowest socioeconomic quartile and with the lowest NELS test scores were more likely to have a high self-concept. Conversely, students from families in the highest socioeconomic quartile and with the highest test scores were likely to have low self-concept. However, school grades were positively correlated with self-concept: those who reported they usually received low grades generally had a low self-concept, while those with high grades felt good about themselves. This suggests that grades received in school were not highly correlated with NELS test performance. Urban students were more likely to have a high self-concept than rural or suburban students.

A series of questions asked how much control students felt they had over their lives. About equal numbers of students felt a high external locus of control and a high internal locus of control. The remaining third of the students fell in the middle. There was no significant difference between males and females or by race. Students with low test scores, low grades and from families in the lowest socioeconomic quartile generally felt they had a low level of control over what happened to them, while students with high test scores, grades and socioeconomic status felt they had a high level of control over their lives.

THE NELS STUDY: BACKGROUND

In 1988, Connecticut began participation in the NELS study, which is sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics. It is designed to provide statewide trend data about critical transitions experienced by young people as they develop, attend school and embark on careers. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the Connecticut State Department of Education funded an augmentation to the national sample so the sample data would be representative of public school students in the state. Like its predecessors, the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NELS-72) and High School and Beyond (HS&B), NELS has been designed to provide information on critical problems facing educators and educational policy makers at all levels. The study includes a cognitive test battery as well as surveys completed by students and school administrators. The initial focus of the study was on eighth graders and their schools in 1988.

Efforts were made to ensure that the sample would be similar in composition to that of the state with regard to urban/suburban/rural district and by racial/ethnic group enrollment, and to ensure that the sample would be sufficiently large so responses of sample students could be generalized to the state eighth grade public school population. All geographic regions of the state were represented. As with all sampling, however, standard errors were calculated for use in considering the sample values as state population estimates. Only areas of the survey where standard errors were small and/or differences in responses by subgroup were large are presented in this report. More detailed information about student characteristics and test scores, and more detailed comparisons between Connecticut students and students throughout the nation, will be presented in future Research Bulletins as data become available.

The sample of Connecticut students had the following characteristics, as self-reported on the student survey. The sample was almost equally divided between males (49.1%) and females (50.9%), and consisted of relatively more minorities (25.4%) than the total state eighth grade public school population (20.9%). Because of small sample sizes, data for Asians and American Indians do not appear as subgroups in this report, but these students are included in totals. The racial composition of the state and NELS samples is shown in Table 8.

Racial/Ethnic Group	Connecticut Eighth Grade	NELS Sample
Am Indian	0.3%	2.6%
Asian	1.9%	2.3%
Black	10.7%	12.0%
Hispanic	8.0%	8.5%
White	79.1%	74.6%

Table 8. Connecticut Enrollment and NELS Sample of Eighth Grade Students by Racial/Ethnic Group

More than half of the students in the Connecticut NELS sample (55.8%) attended schools in suburban districts, with the remaining students in urban (29.0%) and rural districts (15.2%); this is roughly equal to the distribution of all students in the state.

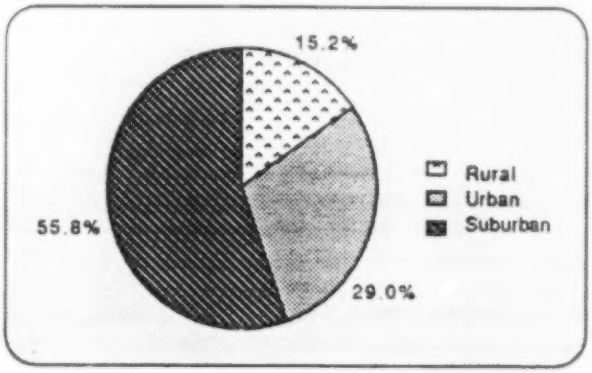

Figure 11. Urban/Suburban/Rural Distribution of Connecticut NELS Sample

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Data in this issue are from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS). For more information on the data included in this bulletin or on the NELS study, contact Judith S. Thompson, Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Research and Teacher Assessment, P. O. Box 2219, Hartford, CT 06145, (203) 566-7369.